The Arizona Early Intervention Program
Connecting with AzEIP

This article is contributed by Maureen Casey, a family representative on AzEIP's Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC).

The Arizona Early Intervention Program-AzEIP-provides services and supports to eligible infants and toddlers and their families when a child has a disability or is not reaching certain developmental milestones. These services and supports, which are designed by the family and the family's team of early interventionists, support the family's ability to care for their child, and are based on the functional outcomes developed by the team.

What are functional outcomes?

Early Intervention services and supports are, by law, based on the family's resources, priorities and concerns, and are statements of the changes family members want to see for their child and themselves. The law specifically says that the outcomes must be functionally stated. This is a fancy way of saying that the outcomes must be written so that the changes you, the family, want, are clearly stated, and that it is apparent when the changes have taken place.

Let's take a look at an example of how this might work: Maria's family has called AzEIP because she is a little over two, and she doesn't say or seem to understand many words. If Maria is eligible for AzEIP, when the team begins to develop the family's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), Maria's family will start by thinking about Maria's strengths. What does Maria like to do? What can she do? Does she like to play on the swing? Does she like to take a bath? What is Maria good at? Then Maria's parents will identify their concerns. Why did they call AzEIP in the first place? When are they having the most challenges with her delay in speech? They will think about their day, in terms of Maria's development, starting with the morning, and moving through the rest of the day, asking themselves questions like, Who is there? What does everyone do? What goes well? What could be improved? Is it difficult to figure out what Maria wants to eat? Is that making mealtimes hard? Is she having trouble playing with other children because she can't express herself? Now Maria's family will think about their resources - strengths and abilities that they have, that can help them with the needs they have just identified. For example, if Maria's family has a swing at home, or lives near a park and Dad likes to put her in the swing in the afternoon, that would be a resource. If Mom takes Maria to Babytime at the library, that would be another of their resources. It is up to Maria's parents to examine the list they have created, and identify their priorities. If Maria's parents say that Maria throws tantrums when she wants their attention, stopping the tantrums might be one of their priorities. The speech therapist might point out that Maria has tantrums because she cannot make her needs known to her parents. The team could think about whether there are specific times when Maria throws tantrums - maybe it's when Mom is getting dinner ready, and isn't focusing on Maria. So the first functional outcome might be: Maria will call "Mama" or "Daddy" when she wants their attention. Perhaps another difficult time is when Dad leaves for work. That desired outcome might be: When her father leaves for work in the morning, Maria will say "bye-bye."

This family has identified their resources, priorities, and concerns, and from them, the team has developed meaningful outcomes. We can easily see what the outcomes are, and we can tell when the child has met the outcomes. The outcomes are based on the family's priorities. They are activities that the family chooses to do and the outcomes really matter to the family.

For you, like many families, early intervention is not the last system you will work with to help your child. Learning how to work with your team to identify your resources, priorities, and concerns, and developing meaningful outcomes, will help you as you move on to other systems. Meaningful, functional outcomes help you to care for your child, and that is a major goal of the early intervention program. AzEIP strives to support you as you care for your child, and developing functional outcomes is one of the ways to meet that goal.